



Tread well, feel better

Walking for fitness



This piece is not intended to serve as medical advice. Consult your physician before beginning any type of exercise program.



Tip: When getting dressed for walking, be sure to layer comfortable, loose clothes. Once your blood starts pumping, you may need to remove a layer. Shoes are important, too – those designed for walking are best.

Most of us walk everyday without even thinking about it. But did you know that walking can also be an integral part of your fitness routine? We want to help you maintain an active and healthy lifestyle. That's why we have put together this brochure of walking tips. Use these tips and suggestions as guidelines on how to make walking more of an activity you want to do and less of one that you need to do.

Walking doesn't just help improve the way you look – it can also improve the way you feel. By introducing a regular walking routine into your schedule, you may experience positive changes such as¹:

- ▶ Reduced blood cholesterol
- ▶ Lower blood pressure
- ▶ Increased cardiovascular endurance
- ▶ Stronger bones
- ▶ Calories burned and weight lost

Getting started

It is important to start each workout with a few easy stretches to loosen up the muscles. Walking in place for a few minutes is a good way to get your blood flowing. You should also stretch your back, shoulders and arms since these muscles will be used during your workout.

Getting going

The Surgeon General, as well as The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), recommends 30 minutes of activity at least five days per week at a moderate-intensity level². This time can be spread out during different parts of the day if you are unable to fit it in all at once. Keep these helpful hints in mind when walking³:

- ▶ Walk short distances. Begin with a five-minute walk and gradually increase your distance.
- ▶ Speed is not important. Maintain a comfortable pace.
- ▶ Focus on good posture. Keep your shoulders down, back and relaxed. Hold your head up and your eyes forward. Tighten your abdominal muscles and buttocks and adopt a natural stride.
- ▶ Move your arms naturally and take deep breaths. If you have trouble catching your breath, slow down.
- ▶ Be sure you can talk while walking. If you can't hold a conversation, you are walking too fast.
- ▶ When ending your walk, slow the pace and stretch well afterwards.

Staying motivated

Staying motivated can be difficult. Here are some tips to help you stick to your fitness routine⁴:

- ▶ Involve other people by asking friends or co-workers to walk with you.
- ▶ Wear a pedometer. It will track your steps and help you aim to increase them.
- ▶ Establish a goal to take part in an organized fitness walk. Look online for walks in your area.

Creating goals

Once you get into the habit of fitness walking, you may want to think about what you are trying to accomplish. Below are some general guidelines to keep in mind⁵:

- ▶ **General Health:** Try to walk for 30 minutes a day, several days a week. Sustain a pace that causes elevated breathing but still allows a conversation.
- ▶ **Improve Cardiovascular Fitness:** Walk 3 to 4 days a week for 20 to 30 minutes at a rapid pace. You should be breathing hard but not gasping for air.
- ▶ **Weight Loss:** Walk at least five days a week for 45 to 60 minutes. Keep a brisk pace.

How many steps should you walk each day?

Recent guidelines from the CDC and ACSM suggest walking 10,000 steps each day. This recommendation is based on the fact that it takes an estimated 2,000 steps to walk a mile. The number of steps in a mile will vary from person to person since it is determined by stride length. To calculate your stride length and how many steps you average per mile, see the box below.

How many steps are in your mile?⁶

1. Mark a distance of 50 feet.
2. Count the number of steps you take while walking this distance.
3. Divide 50 by the number of steps you've taken. This is your stride length.
4. Divide 5,280 by your stride length. This is the average steps you take per mile.

On most days a fairly active person takes between 4,000 and 6,000 steps. The extra steps required to reach the 10,000 step goal will help you reach the 30 minutes of activity recommended by the Surgeon General.

It is okay to work up to the 10,000 step goal. If you don't typically move around much during the day, it is a good idea to increase your daily steps in small increments. A person who takes an average of 3,000 steps should aim to reach 4,000 – 5,000 steps first. Once you feel comfortable taking that many steps, keep increasing that number until you reach 10,000.

Remember, it is important to work at your own pace. If you are not used to exercising, you should gradually build up to 10,000 steps.



Increasing your steps

Adding more steps into your daily routine is easier than you may think. Below are a few suggestions to help get you started:

- ▶ Walk the dog
- ▶ Use the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator
- ▶ Park farther away from the office or the store
- ▶ Walk to a co-worker's desk to ask a question instead of calling or e-mailing
- ▶ Schedule a walking meeting
- ▶ Window shop

Resting heart rate

Your resting heart rate is the number of times your heart beats per minute while you are at rest. The best time to determine your resting heart rate is before you get out of bed after a good night's sleep. The average resting heart rate is 60–80 beats per minute but may be lower in individuals who are physically fit.

Maximum heart rate

This is the amount of beats per minute your heart can handle. To determine your maximum heart rate, subtract your age from 220.

Target heart rate

This is the heart rate you should attempt to reach during exercise for the most aerobic benefit. To calculate your target heart rate, subtract your age from 220. This is your **maximum heart rate (HR_{max})**. For example, the HR_{max} for a 40-year-old would be $220 - 40 = 180$.

Note: Target heart rate is only a guide and varies by the individual. Do not use the target heart rate measurement if you are on medication that affects your heart rate. These medications include beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers, or digoxin. If you have a heart condition or another chronic disease, consult your doctor before exercising.

Day of the week

Number of steps or minutes walked

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Day of the week

Number of steps or minutes walked

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday



Sources:

¹ National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. Walking: a step in the right direction. Accessed: 01/07/2009

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. How much physical activity do adults need? Accessed: 04/13/2010

³ Shape Up America. Getting started on the 10,000 Steps Program. Accessed: 04/13/2010

⁴ President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. Physical activity: the "magic pill." Accessed: 01/07/2009

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Overcoming barriers to physical activity.

⁶ US Preventive Services Task Force. "Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans: Recommendation statement. 2008. Accessed March 1, 2009. Insurance coverage provided by or through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or its affiliates. Administrative services provided by United HealthCare Services, Inc. or their affiliates.